

Add State Party to List of GOP Groups with Dubious Tactics

Editorial
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Revelations of yet another questionable campaign by Texas Republicans in the 2002 election have surfaced -- revelations that should lead to another investigation. The Houston Chronicle reported this week that the Republican Party of Texas raised money from corporations and diverted those funds to a federal committee that bought advertising in state campaigns. It is illegal in Texas to spend corporate donations on state political campaigns.

However, in 2002, federal law was far less restrictive, and all manner of political spending on campaigns was designated as an administrative expense. According to the Chronicle, the state party's federal committee -- the Texas Republican Congressional Campaign Committee -- spent millions on state election activities.

Karen Lundquist, executive director of the Texas Ethics Commission, said it doesn't matter if the spending was done by the congressional committee. If the spending was to influence a state election, it falls under Texas election law.

All this, of course, follows the uproar that began more than a year ago over the Texas Association of Business raising nearly \$2 million in corporate money to spend on state legislative races. To avoid Texas law prohibiting corporate spending on state races, the TAB argued, with a wink, that its efforts fell under allowable voter information advertising.

That was laughable to anyone who saw the actual ads, with pictures of targeted candidates and voting records prominently displayed. The TAB effort is now under investigation by a Travis County grand jury and is the subject of civil action.

Travis County prosecutors are also investigating 2002 election spending by Texans for a Republican Majority, the political action committee connected to U.S. House Majority Leader Tom DeLay, R- Sugar Land. Allegations are that DeLay's committee spent millions in corporate money to support Republican candidates in legislative races.

All of these efforts were aspects of the same strategy: to find ways around the state law against spending corporate money in political campaigns. The various GOP entities, from DeLay's political action committee to the state Republican Party, were

trying to evade the law in order to spend the millions they'd raised from corporations to help Republican candidates and build an overwhelming majority in the Texas Legislature.

The GOP powers involved, including DeLay, TAB president Bill Hammond, and Wayne Hamilton, former executive director of the Texas Republican Party, have shown nothing but contempt for the state restriction on spending corporate money on political campaigns.

"I apologize that it wasn't more" money, Hamilton arrogantly said when confronted with the latest allegations.

Clearly, another investigation must be added to the growing files of questionable Republican campaign tactics. The sooner the better.